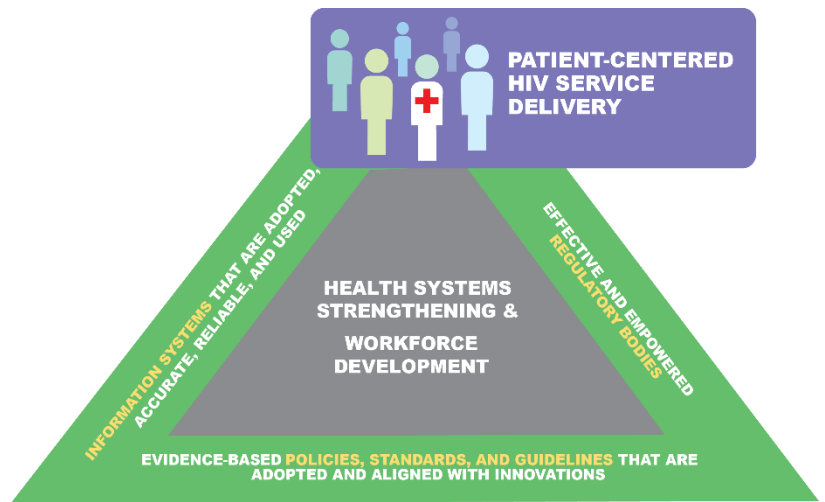# Health Care Regulatory Strengthening

The increased availability of health services from the public and private sectors in many countries has benefited patients in many ways, but the diversification of health systems has also created a new challenge: ***How do governments effectively regulate the quality of health services provided in increasingly complex health systems?*** The pursuit of universal health coverage has brought increased attention to the quality of health services being delivered by private and public sectors providers, due to concerns about the quality of services being purchased by governmental health insurance schemes. Strengthening governance and regulatory systems, as described by the WHO Health System Building Blocks, is therefore critical to achieving and sustaining the potential of universal health coverage.

I-TECH believes that efficient regulatory and governance structures are critical to ensuring the delivery of high-quality health care and achieving the potential of universal health coverage.

Unfortunately, in many counties, health care regulatory environments have not kept pace with the expansion and diversification of the health care system. Practitioner and facility quality standards and associated legal frameworks are often absent, creating confusion and inhibiting the ability of regulatory agencies to take action when quality concerns are raised. Some countries are also seeing the expansion of medical negligence lawsuits and other legal actions even though comprehensive legal and regulatory standards are not in place. In countries where health care legal and regulatory standards have been adopted, regulatory agencies, such as Ministries of Health, health care professional councils, and facility licensing agencies, often lack the financial and human resources needed to adequately enforce these standards. Effective regulatory bodies also require information systems to track a wide range of data flows from practitioners and facilities, but these information systems are often unavailable or do not meet the unique needs of regulatory agencies.

I-TECH Capacity

The University of Washington's International Training and Education Center for Health (I-TECH) has broad expertise in strengthening health care regulatory systems in low- and middle-income countries. I-TECH's approach to regulatory strengthening emphasizes the importance of sustainability and country ownership, by working with ministries of health, health professional councils, and health professional associations to:

- Conduct sound situational analyses and needs assessments;
- Develop standard operating procedures to efficiently operationalize and scale key regulatory activities;
- Develop regulatory information management systems;
- Develop standards to establish consistent expecations for high-quality health services; and
- Develop continuing professional development frameworks and guidelines.

Program Reach

Continuing Professional Development. I-TECH supported the Nurses and Midwifery Council of **Malawi** (NMCM) to conduct a national evaluation of its Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program for nursing and midwifery cadres. In **Cambodia**, I-TECH is supporting the implementation of a national law requiring all health practitioners to be licensed and complete regular CPD courses and developing standard operating procedures for registration, licensing, and CPD tracking. I-TECH supported the **South African** Nursing Council (SANC) to help develop a national *CPD Framework for Nurses and Midwives*. I-TECH supported the government in **Tanzania** to develop an in-service framework that applies to all health cadres in the country called the *National Continuing Professional Development Framework for Health Care Providers in Tanzania*.

Strengthening Health Professional Associations. I-TECH worked with the Ethiopian Nurses Association (ENA) in the past to strengthen the ENA infrastructure and build capacity to support an expanded leadership and advocacy role for nursing professionals in **Ethiopia**. I-TECH also worked to build the leadership and governance capacity of ENA by providing leadership training to ENA board members as well as supporting the ENA to hire a project coordinator. I-TECH was also an active member of the Ethiopian National Nursing Standards of Care Technical Working Group. In **Cambodia**, I-TECH is working with health professional councils and associations to strengthen the provision and accreditation of CPD providers throughout the country.

Scopes and Standards of Practice. I-TECH has helped the Nurses and Midwifery Council of **Malawi** (NMCM) revise the scopes of midwifery practice in Malawi; it has also provided technical assistance to NMCM to revise and update professional code of ethics documents to help define and standardize ethical obligations expected of the nurses and midwives. I-TECH is supporting the Midwifery Council of **Cambodia** to develop an updated scope of practice and standards or practice for midwives and working with the Nursing Council of Cambodia to update the scope of practice for nurses. I-TECH conducted a content evaluation of scopes of practice for nurses in **Tanzania** and **South Africa** and their potential effect on nurse prescribing of antiretroviral therapy.

Regulatory and Policy Information Systems. I-TECH is working in **Cambodia** to strengthen a practitioner registration and licensing information management system designed for use by five national health professional councils (medicine, nursing, midwifery, dentistry, and pharmacy). I-TECH is designing and building a policy information management software system with the **South Africa** NDOH that can manage and host a wide range of clinical guidelines and other regulatory policies.

Regulatory Environment Assessments. UW/I-TECH conducted content evaluations of laws, policies, and regulations in **Kenya**, **Uganda**, **South Africa**, **Nigeria**, and **Tanzania** addressing a range of health care regulatory issues, such as scope of practice laws; health information confidentiality laws; and age of consent for HIV testing and counseling, antiretroviral therapy initiation and coluntary male medical circumcision. In **Cambodia**, I-TECH recently conducted an evaluation of a joint secretariat of health professional councils to identify gaps and opportunity to strengthen the implementation of a national practitioner licensing law.

Health Facility Licensing and Accreditation. I-TECH is supporting the government of **Cambodia** to establish a hospital accreditation program to highlight high performing private sector hospitals. In **South Africa**, I-TECH supported the the Ideal Clinic program, which established quality standards for high performing public sector primary care clinics. I-TECH faculty have also conducted research examining attitudes and opinions of key stakeholders to health facility accreditation programs in **Kenya**, **Uganda**, and **Tanzania.**

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September 2019